



Bicycle Helmet Use Laws

The United States Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) supports the enactment of bicycle helmet usage laws. Bicycle helmets offer bicyclists the best protection from head injuries resulting from bicycle crashes, and bicycle helmet laws have been proven effective in increasing bicycle helmet use.

Key Facts

- Almost 44,000 bicyclists have died in traffic crashes in the United States since 1932—the first year that bicycle fatality estimates were recorded.
- In 1995, 830 bicyclists were killed, and approximately 61,000 were injured in traffic-related crashes. Children ages 14 and under accounted for 256 (31%) of these fatalities, making this one of the most frequent causes of injury-related death for young children.
- Each year almost 400,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in emergency rooms for bicycle-related injuries.
- Universal bicycle helmet use by children ages 4 to 15 would prevent 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries, and 18,000 to 55,000 scalp and face injuries annually.
- Bicycle helmets are 85-88 percent effective in mitigating head and brain injuries, making the use of helmets the single most effective way to reduce head injuries and fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes.
- Despite the fact that 70 to 80 percent of all fatal bicycle crashes involve head injuries, only 10 to 15 percent of all bicyclists wear bicycle helmets.

- Nationally, bicyclists ages 14 and under are at *five times* greater risk for injury than older cyclists.
- As with safety belts, child safety seats, and motorcycle helmets, the enactment of laws requiring the use of bicycle helmets, along with education and visible enforcement, is likely to be the most promising way to increase bicycle helmet usage.

Legislative Status

- The first bicycle helmet law was passed in California in 1986. This law was amended in 1993 to cover all children under age 18.
- As of August 1996, 15 states have enacted age-specific bicycle helmet laws. Most of these laws cover bicyclists under age 16.
- On June 16, H.R. 965, the Child Safety Protection Act of 1994, was passed. It requires the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to develop a mandatory bicycle helmet standard. *(continued)*

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Legislative Status *(continued)*

- The CPSC published a proposed rule on August 15, 1994, requesting comments on a proposed bicycle helmet standard that includes requirements specifically applicable to children's helmets, and requirements to prevent the helmets from coming off during a crash. Pending issuance of the CPSC standard, bicycle helmet manufacturers are required to conform with existing voluntary performance standards, such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) and the Snell Memorial Foundation.

Cost Savings

- The estimated cost of bicycle-related injuries and deaths (for all ages) is \$8 billion.
- It is expensive to treat bicycle-related head injuries because these injuries can endure throughout a lifetime.
- Every \$10 bike helmet saves this country \$30 in direct health costs, and an additional \$365 in societal costs. In fact, if 85 percent of all child bicyclists wore helmets every time they rode a bicycle for a year, the lifetime medical cost savings would total \$109 to \$142 million.

Who Supports Bicycle Helmet Use Laws?

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Automobile Association
- Centers for Disease Control
- Consumer Product Safety Commission
- Health Resources and Services Administration
- Little League Baseball
- National Safe Kids Campaign
- National Head Injury Foundation
- National Safety Council
- Snell Memorial Foundation

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991

ISTEA requires each state to establish and fund a Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator position in its State Department of Transportation. The Coordinator promotes and facilitates the increased use of non-motorized modes of transportation, including developing facilities for use by pedestrians and bicyclists, and creating public education, promotional and safety programs to teach how to use these facilities. Pedestrian and bicycle safety remains a priority area for highway safety program funding. Its status as a priority area expedites the approval of highway safety grant funds for pedestrian and bicycle safety activities.

Information Sources

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These reports and additional information are available through your State Office of Highway Safety, the NHTSA Regional Office serving your state, or from NHTSA Headquarters, Traffic Safety Programs, NTS-23, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590, 202-366-1739.